



Florida House of Representatives

Democratic Office

Franklin Sands
Democratic Leader

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March 13, 2009

The Honorable Larry Cretul
Speaker of the House
Florida House of Representatives
420 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Speaker Cretul:

As Governor Charlie Crist has informed us, historic legislation passed by Congress last month will provide relief to state and local governments across the nation during these challenging economic times.

Given the shocking severity of Florida's economic woes, it is imperative that the Florida Legislature takes action now to incorporate these federal economic recovery funds into the 2009-10 state budget.

As the governor has repeatedly said, federal dollars targeted at Florida's infrastructure, workforce training, educational and health care needs will create jobs and stimulate needed investment.

Today, as we are about to learn more precisely the magnitude of our state's revenue shortfalls, I am seeking new assurances from you that the House of

Representatives will conduct an open public debate on Florida's state budget--- including deliberations on how the state will put federal economic recovery funds to work.

In prior years and during the special session on the budget held in February, major decisions on the budget have been made behind closed doors --- decisions that were made exclusively by majority party members with no or little input from the public, minority party legislators, or even majority party legislators who do not hold leadership positions.

These decisions made behind closed doors have typically pertained to tax cuts, revenue enhancements, total state spending in the budget, and the allocations of spending within the various policy areas of the budget.

The Florida House Democratic Caucus has sought the ability to participate in these decisions. Our requests have been repeatedly rejected. In recent days, we have been told again that we will be not allowed opportunities to fully participate in the state budget-writing process. This is a disappointment that I hope you can rectify.

Since our budget problems are so severe, we believe this is the year to involve all members of the Florida House of Representatives---and the public---in providing meaningful input on a state spending plan. After all, this year's budget requires decisions that are among the most important of our generation.

We recommend that the Florida House next week holds full and open hearings of the combined appropriations councils and the House Finance & Taxation Council to discuss these important financial decisions of our state.

Waiting any longer to hold hearings that involve members of the Legislature from both political parties with public participation would be a wasteful exercise and a disservice to the public.

Respectfully,

Franklin Sands
House Democratic Leader